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ABSTRACT

Effective communication with children is a human process that can help or hinder development. The term "communication" encompasses both the content perspective (what is communicated) and the transportation perspective (the manner in which meaning is communicated). The most important communication factor, human perspective, has two implications for parents and teachers. The first implication, concerning the notion of community, concerns values and attitudes transmitted to children through either direct or indirect communication. The second implication, regarding inevitability of change, reflects the constant need in a changing society to review and modify communicative understandings. Important in the communications environment are the media, which provide assumptions and limitations that can potentially affect communication. For example, television (a one-way, two-dimensional medium) is typically uninterruptible and can provide only an illusion of reality. Family and familial groups are the most significant factors within the communication environment. Eight suggestions for communicating with children are (1) don't be married to time, (2) don't be too busy to answer a youngster, (3) discipline for positive speech, (4) remember that it's not always what is said but what is done that is communicated, (5) retain a child's perspective, (6) be aware of the limitations and advantages of evolving technologies, (7) take notice of the total child, and (8) help youngsters to be creative. (BJD)

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PERSPECTIVES

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COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN

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Address to

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Dr. T.R. Morrison, President
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INTRODUCTION

When I began thinking about how I might address the subject, COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN, this morning, I felt that you had cast me, in a sense, in the role of a prophet - expecting to hear some fool-proof recipes for effective communication with children. Unfortunately, I have not arrived here with a recipe book. Indeed, I haven't got one - for the art of communication to me is as individual as the myriad of individuals that make up the human race. What works in one situation may not work in another. What works at one point in time with a particular youngster may not be effective down the road.

However, what I thought I might be able to do is to give you a perspective of Communication, a way of looking at the concept, and a few ideas perhaps which may stimulate your discussion and thought.

Let me quickly overview how I have divided my remarks.

I'd like initially to spend a few minutes simply talking about WHAT WE MEAN BY THE TERM, COMMUNICATION. We hear so frequently about all of the new-fangled developments in communications technologies. We hear too that, despite all of these developments, many people today are feeling more and more alientated from each other. Is there a paradox here? Or are we confused about what communication is really all about?

The second thing that I thought might be helpful would be to spend a few minutes envisioning with you some of the parameters of the

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COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENT that we find ourselves living in in the 1980's. Yesteryear it was radio and television; today it is the computer and microprocessing; and heaven knows what will be tomorrow. What role do these technologies play? What other media affect communication? And, most important, where do WE fit in - as individuals, parents and families?

In my final few minutes, I would like to share with you SOME IDEAS WHICH I HAVE FOUND USEFUL, both professionally and personally, in communicating with young children. These ideas, I think, fit within the perspective I will focus on this morning and although I should stress that most of my experience has been with young children - the eight year and under group - I do not think that my ideas would differ very much if I were to talk about communication between or among persons generally.

First then -

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Let me begin with a poem. It is entitled Growing by Ann Johnstone. And, it is in the words of a young child.

GROWING

I start out tender as a chick, as open as a flower.
Your love can make me fly and bloom, it's all within your power
But if you call me bad and dumb, no doubt I turn out tough,
I'll grow a shell and close my ears, for I can't bear that stuff.
Please praise my goods and make me feel OK whene'er I fail.
If I can't know I'll grow and learn, I'll build a mental jail
Yes, I'll retreat, I'll fear all things that challenge me to try.
Encourage hope and confidence, and I will grow my "I".

What does Communication mean?

If you read through communications textbooks or talk to people about communication, you find, I think, that the definitions or interpretations tend to fall into three main perspectives or points of view.

The first kind of meaning I would label a CONTENT VIEW OF COMMUNICATION. This view focuses attention on the bits and pieces of information that are transmitted or communicated from one person to another. What is important is WHAT is being said. Admittedly, what is being said is part of communication, but only a part. Divorced from the communicators or, indeed, the process of transmission, this view limits our understanding of the total human dynamic involved in the communication process.

A second view, and perhaps the most popular today, is what might be termed a TRANSPORTATION VIEW OF COMMUNICATION. Under the terms of these theories, we cannot speak so much about <u>how much information</u> a person receives but more about <u>how much information a message has</u>. For example, Berelson and Steiner define communication as, and I quote:

> The transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc. by use of symbols - words, pictures figures, graphs, etc. It is the <u>act</u> or <u>process</u> of transmission that is usually called communication.

From this school of thought, it would follow quite simply that "more effective" communication would result if only we could develop faster, more efficient, technologies. I submit, however, that this view, as the Content View, limits our understanding. It focuses our attention on

the mechanical means of communication rather than on the communicators themselves.

The third perspective, and the one I feel to be most useful, does focus on the communicators. I call this view the HUMAN PERSPECTIVE OF COMMUNICATION. In short, communication does not derive from technology. Rather, it derives from the basic human need to share and to extend our being beyond ourselves. It is this sharing process, this human exchange between and among persons, that I call communication. In our need to share, to learn, and to inform, we frequently use artifacts such as the telephone, or the television, or books, or whatever. These communications technologies could be termed media or mediating processes. Obviously, they frequently facilitate human interchange. However, these artifacts and media in and of themselves are not communication and, indeed, can develop or be used in directions which, in fact, can impede human interchange and development.

> To illustrate, we can look at the telephone. The telephone, as you know, has been a fantastic medium for helping people keep in touch. As Ma Bell says: "It's the next best thing to being there." And yet sometimes I feel that the telephone helps to distance people from each other. Instead of making the effort to travel the distance to visit with family or friends, people simply will pick up the telephone and say "Hello", "How are you?" As you can appreciate, a face-to-face visit is a much more familial medium for communication but generally requires greater effort on the part of the persons involved. If the telephone is used as a substitute for a visit, I would say that it is being used as a second class medium. If, on the other hand, a visit is simply not possible, because of the distance for example, then the telephone is a very useful communications tool.

If I go back to the poem I started with, you will recall that it

made no mention of any technology. Instead, it emphasized quite simply the importance of an interchange or a rapport between two persons. I have sometimes called communication the PUTTY - the tangible and the intangible that occurs between or among persons that makes each one involved more human - whether or not the communication is assisted by artifacts or media of one kind or another.

From this human-focused perspective, there are two implications that I would like to highlight as I feel they have particular inferences for us as parents and teachers.

Notion of Community

The first implication is related to the notion of COMMUNITY. Through their communications, people develop common understandings or perceptions which are used to guide their everyday lives. For example, a youngster learns to use a spoon and a fork with which to eat rather than using his fingers. My point here is that if we didn't develop these common understandings, these guidelines, our life in community -- that is, with others -- would be one of chaos. It is the shared understandings that provide the behavioural norms in our families, our communities, and our society. Developing these shared understandings is one key function of communication.

For us as parents and teachers of children, it is important to recognize that the understandings that will occur among our children will stem directly, not only from the knowledge or information that is

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communicated, but also from the values and attitudes that we as parents and adults believe in and practice in our day-to-day lives. In short, the effects of communication can be both direct - that is, when you give a youngster specific information - and indirect - through body gestures and the overall attitudes that come across to your child whether you like it or not.

Inevitability of Change

The second implication is related to the inevitability of CHANGE in our society. Besides developing common understandings to guide our lives, we are constantly trying to reshape our environment, to improve our lives, to dream new futures. Because of this, there is a constant need to review and sometimes to change or to modify our understandings and the understandings that we wish our youngsters to acquire. We live in a changing society which, in turn, requires constant and re-creative communication.

When I think about change, I think about how different the world is for children now than it was when I was growing up. And perhaps one of the most difficult problems as a parent is to be able to look at our world through our children's eyes rather than through the eyes that we had as children. To me personally this has been very difficult at times because I feel that my values are sometimes in conflict with the societal values that have evolved over the years.

> Let me illustrate with a situation that I had recently with my eight-year old.
>
> One day, not long ago, my youngster arrived home from school

> with a math paper. She obviously had got all of the questions correct - or, in our day, 100%! I commented something to the effect: "Well done, Kristin." Her comment back to me, however, I did not expect. She did not say: "Oh, thanks Mom . . ." but instead said an absolute non sequitor. She said, and I think I can recall it verbatim: "I wish you were more like Cindy's Mom -- (Cindy being a friend of hers) -- because everytime she gets her work all right, her Mom gives her a quarter." Did I or did I not feel like a second-class Mom!
>
> But there was something important being said. Somewhere along the way there has evolved for many people a value that you need to earn money for everything you do, you need to get something back, something that is tangible. I disagree with this notion. The point I am trying to make, however, is that, in communicating and working with kids, you have to be sensitive to the kind of norms and values to which kids today are being exposed in their environment. This doesn't mean that you have to accept the societal values or attitudes. But it does mean that you have to work with youngsters THROUGH THEIR EYES, from their vantage point, if you are going to be effective in your communication.

Let me try to summarize. Communication is a human process. It is the process through which we help or hinder the development of another person or persons. What we communicate and how we communicate are important dimensions. But, the most important factor of all is the communicators themselves, and what happens to them as persons as a result of the communication.

COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENT

Now, if I might, I'd like to change my remarks from the question of what is communication to the COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENT. What factors or elements "out-there" affect our communication? What about the so-called communications technologies? And, what role does the family and individual parents and teachers play within this total environment?

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The first question can be answered quickly. Everything in the world has the potential and the capacity to affect communication. Just think of your own situations. Let's take the weather, for example. Has the weather ever affected your relationship with another person? I certainly know that the last snowfall in Burlington a few weeks ago affected the communication among all my staff. And - that communication was almost all gloom! Or, have you ever thought about man-made objects, things like buildings and tools -- a small room versus a big room, a stuffy room versus an air-conditioned one. Try teaching a youngster about cooking without the help of resources such as pans and spoons. Or, what about our overall political and social structures? The recent budget of Allen MacEachan certainly has stimulated a lot of discussion throughout the country. In short, every medium, whether natural or man-made, regardless of its content or purpose, has the potential and capacity to affect communication.

For us, as parents trying to communicate with our youngsters, what is most important is to recognize that each medium has inherent within it certain assumptions and limitations. If we do not understand these assumptions and limitations, we can MIS-USE rather than USE that medium effectively. And here I think of the many so-called communications technologies that are available today.

Earlier I talked briefly about the telephone. Here, by way of illustration, I would like to take a look at another of the technologies, TELEVISION. I chose this medium because it is one of the most pervasive and visible in existence today. It also has had tremendous impact on

kids during the past two or three decades and indeed on communication between parents and children.

Let's first look at the facts. Children watch a lot of television. 97% of Canadian homes now have at least one television set. Many children will spend more time in front of the television by the time they enter Kindergarten than they will spend in their entire lives in the classroom. The average Canadian child watches between 23-28 hours of television per week. I personally find these findings frightening. I call it the "Trade-off Effect". If a child (or any person for that matter) watches a lot of television, there is simply little time left over for much else, including face-to-face communication.

But - let's go back to the point I made above. Let's look at some of the assumptions and limitations of television. Do parents really know what's happening when they "trade-off" their parenting responsibility to communicate to what I might call a surrogate communicator?

Let me mention just four characteristics.

First, television, by its nature and design, is a TWO-DIMENSIONAL MEDIUM only. You can hear it. You can see it. Indeed, you can see it in living colour! But, you can't live it. And, for children in particular, this is a major limitation because, as I am sure all of you know, children learn to a large extent through active participation and involvement with the environment around them. A child likes to see things, to feel things, to touch things, and to talk about things. If you watch a young child at

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play, his whole being is involved in the activity. It's a LIVED experience. With television, you cannot LIVE the experience, you can only watch the action.

A second characteristic of television is its UNINTERRUPTIBILITY. I mentioned earlier that a primary function of communication was to dream alternative futures, to reshape one's environment. I call this the ability to be CREATIVE. Imaging alternative futures is very difficult to do with a medium such as television because you can't stop it the way you can, say, when reading a book, and you can't interrupt or question as you can in a conversation. If you stop watching the television, you miss the next part. In short, television does not provide time for reflection or dreaming.

Third, television is ONE-WAY. You can't talk back to it. It simply does not give you an opportunity for interaction with another person. With young children in particular, the opportunity to ask questions is critical because young minds simply have not the inventory of information and ideas from which to have understanding.

The fourth and final characteristic I'll mention, I have labelled the ILLUSION OF REALITY. Television seems to provide a direct vision of what's happening around us. It has often been called a "window to the world". Certainly, nobody would disagree that television has expanded our awareness, but this awareness has been created through snapshots or snippets of information, incomplete images in many instances, or what I call illusions of reality.

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What effect do these illusions have on children? Children, as you know, particularly young children, have a difficulty distinguishing between what is real and what is not real. The powerful visual impact of television is such that many children will accept what they see on television as real.

> Let me tell you another short but true story. I know of a mother who has two young boys who are particularly fond of watching television, especially police dramas. Startsky and Hutch, Charlie's Angels, and Kojak come quickly to mind. One day, her two boys began talking to her about policemen and a policeman's job. What came out, and a complete surprise to the mother, was the realization that her boys believed, very strongly, that, one, if a policeman came upon a suspect in a crime, he immediately would draw his revolver, point, and shout very loudly, "Put your hands up or I'll shoot". They also believed that policemen "always got their man" and that a daily routine would include at least one apprehension of a criminal and at least one high-speed car chase.

The point that I'm trying to make is simply this. What is real to a child, irrespective of the source, becomes a formative influence on how that child will behave, act, perceive future situations. If a child watches too much television, there is a greater chance that his value system and his perception of the world around him will be shaped by influences which are, in a sense, unreal.

But let us get back to us as parents and as teachers. We cannot look at or communicate with our children in isolation. Children, as mentioned above, are influenced by <u>all</u> of the elements in their environment. Some elements like television -- and coming on stream now various applications of the microprocessor -- have had and will have a major influence on our children. They are influential because of their communicating characteristics. They are also influential because as <u>mass</u> media -- that is, available to most everyone -- they have the capacity

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to homogenize the values and attitudes in our society.

It's the old game of role-modelling. And, as I am sure all of you here know, kids are an easy target. If they like what they see, they like to copy.

> Let me again talk personally. My little five-year old has recently become amoured by "Barbie"! She has seen how beautiful Barbie is on TV and in the advertising displays at the store, especially if she wears Barbie make-up! The other day, primarily to keep her out of my own cosmetics, I bought her Barbie make-up. (I may live to regret that decision.) But what is interesting is what has happened. When my youngster finishes putting on her lipstick, her nail polish, her powder, her cologne and, in particular, her eye shadow, she perceives herself then as beautiful.

The question to us as parents is, What kind of role models do we want our youngsters to follow long term? Are they the television characters? Here, what passes through my mind, as far as young children are concerned, are The Flintstones, Big Bird, and Star Wars characters. Are they the "Barbies" in our society? Are we as parents being sufficiently sensitive to ensure that alternative role models, ones from the real world, are also playing a role in a child's environment.

If I stand back and try to look at a child's overall COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENT, I cannot help but come to the conclusion that a child's FAMILY and his FAMILIAL GROUPS such as his preschool or nursery school are the most important aspects. Why? They are the most important because of the real human relationships which are established. It is through real relationships that opportunities are created for close, constant, loving and caring human interchange. These are the role-modelling experiences

that are important in a young child's life. As you know, a child's family is the place where language is first learned, where a youngster is exposed to his initial attitudes, traditions, and customs. Through our communications with our parents and our teachers, we learn to learn, we learn to live, and we learn to love. The bottom line to me is developing such familial relationships. If we are successful in developing the values and practices of caring and sharing in our young children, we can contribute to the evolution of what I think all of us dream of and that is the evolution of a more human or Familial Society.

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN

Finally, in the last few minutes I have, I'd like to share with you a few ideas which I personally have found useful in working with young children. I want to make it clear that I do not have any magic solutions to the question of COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN, but perhaps my experience will provide some food for thought. (To provide a little visual communication, I have brought with me a few slides of children from my school in Burlington.)

1. Don't Be Married to Time

My first idea is a simple one: DON'T BE MARRIED TO TIME. As parents and as teachers, we have to be organized, or at least try to be organized! And, when we are dealing with groups of children as, say, in a school situation or in a family with a number of children, the need to plan activities according to the clock is quite important on occasion. For example, taking a school situation, you may have storytime at 10:00 - snack at 10:20 -

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outdoor play - lunch - and so on. Unfortunately, kids don't operate this way. They don't understand the concept of time as we as adults know it and use it. Frequently, I think we forget this about children. I know that I am always talking with my staff about being flexible. For instance, if a youngster is thoroughly enjoying his painting - even though the program plan says time for something else - try to be flexible and let this small artist continue until he or she is finished. DON'T BE MARRIED TO TIME.

2. Don't Be Too Busy to Answer a Youngster

A second DON'T - DON'T BE TOO BUSY TO ANSWER A YOUNGSTER. How often have I heard, "Not now, Johnny, I'm too busy!" I know that sometimes this has to be said, but does it always! How does the child feel? What are you communicating? Is it love and caring and "Hey, you're important!" Or, is it rejection, you're not important, finishing the dishes is more important? I noted above that communication refers to attitudes that are coming across as well as what one says. I do not think that it is always necessary to stop what one is doing and spend time with the youngster tugging at one's apron strings. What is important, however, is that an immediate caring response is made. I can hear the youngster call:

> Please Mommy, please Mommy don't be too busy
> Please don't turn your back on my plea
> To have us together, to touch and to smile
> For nothing could possibly be
> More important than teaching a child how to love
> It will magnify, grow in my heart
> To include all humanity, here on our earth
> And to think - your love was the start.

3. Discipline

My third idea is related to the age-old problem of DISCIPLINE. We have a philosophy or point of view at our school - if, in the course of a day, 90-95% of one's communications with a youngster are POSITIVE and only about 5% or at most 10% are NEGATIVE, you can't go far wrong. One of the little teaching techniques we sometimes use in the school is that, if we find a teacher having difficulty with a child, and always seeming to be saying "NO", "DON'T DO THAT", we will have that teacher keep a sheet of paper and record over, say, an hour or a morning, the number of times she was negative and the number of times she talked to that youngster positively or encouragingly. This exercise can be quite revealing. Sometimes teachers and also parents simply don't realize how negative we become at times with our youngsters.

4. It's Not Always What You Say But What You Do Which Is Being Communicated

Fourth point - also related to discipline - IT'S NOT ALWAYS WHAT YOU SAY BUT WHAT YOU DO WHICH IS BEING COMMUNICATED. Let me give you two quick examples.

> The first one - if you take a child by his hand, you are communicating "togetherness", even though you may be disciplining that youngster. If, on the other hand, you take a child by his wrist, you are communicating "mastery over", and youngsters, even small ones, do not react very positively to this kind of handling.
>
> My second example is one I see daily at our school. At the end of the day, there are two types of parents who come to pick up their children. The first type of parent arrives, picks up his child and is obviously delighted to see that youngster. He will spend a few minutes talking to him about his day, his art

> work, etc. The other type of parent arrives and says exactly the same words. "Did you have a nice day?" "Oh, your picture is very good." The body gestures, however, are communicating exactly the opposite. What is really being communicated is, "Hey, hurry up. I'm late." "My car is parked where it shouldn't be." "Oh, why are you so slow!" IT'S NOT ALWAYS WHAT YOU SAY BUT WHAT YOU DO WHICH IS BEING COMMUNICATED.

5. Retain a Child's Perspective

My fifth point I have labelled RETAIN A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE. You will recall that I talked earlier about dealing with or communicating with children THROUGH THEIR EYES, being sensitive to the factors or media that are influencing them directly. Here, what I want to note is that a child's perspective can refer to his physical environment as well as his overall social environment and value system.

> This point always comes home to me as I watch the toddlers at our school skooting down the hallway on their trikes. As I bend down to help a youngster, I am reminded of what they see as a result of their short stature. If you get down to the level of a toddler, what really does the world look like? It is a world of KNEES! It is a world of BLANK WALLS - because usually pictures and art work are hung above their eye level. If a youngster looks up to an adult, he sees faces a long, long way up.
>
> We can't lengthen a small child's legs or make him grow up more quickly. But we can make our communications with him more effective by such simple things as kneeling down to his size when we talk to him, by hanging at least some art work or pictures at his eye level. I have often said that communicating with kids has a lot to do with exploiting or using the "kid" that is present in all of us!

6. Be Aware of the Limitations and Advantages of the Evolving Technologies

Sixth idea - BE AWARE OF THE LIMITATIONS AND ADVANTAGES OF THE

EVOLVING TECHNOLOGIES. We talked before about television. Despite what I said about its limitations, I would be the last person to say get rid of television. First of all, in many homes, that would be impossible and, secondly, television has a number of strengths. Certainly, it is one of the most marvellous media for providing information, for developing awareness, or for being that "window to the world". However, what I think we as parents must do is first and foremost limit a child's viewing and, secondly, use discretion about what a child watches. We must perceive television as only a PART of the child's communications environment and ensure that it remains only a part.

With the new technologies - computers, computer games, etc. - the same concerns arise. As parents, we would be amiss to ignore the new technologies. Our kids certainly won't. But what can we do? Perhaps here I can offer four simple suggestions which relate to communications technologies in general.

First, as parents and teachers, make sure we are aware of the characteristics of the various media in play, both their limitations as well as their strengths. You can't use technology effectively without first understanding them.

Second, ensure that children have opportunities for LIVED experiences - PLAY - a wide diversity as well as sufficient experiences. Here, I am simply reminding us all of the need to have a BALANCE between LIVED experiences and experiences which make use of the communications technologies such as television.

Third, get involved in the technology with your children. With television, for example, watch programs with your children whenever possible. This not only allows the parent

to help the child assess what he or she is watching but also can help his understanding by answering any questions that arise later.

Fourth, take advantage of the technology. Use the television to stimulate discussion or follow-up activity. I feel that any creative parent or teacher can find a germ of a good idea in most television programs that kids watch. I recall, for instance, an English teacher who would have his students watch a television drama the previous night and then use that program to teach things like characterization, development of plot, use of English, etc. If I look at computer games, I find that they can be used to teach a child a lot about logic and problem solving as well as providing entertainment, the manufacturers' primary objective.

7. Take Notice

My seventh idea could be summarized as TAKE NOTICE. Our motto at Brant Children's Centre is "I AM, I CAN, I WILL". "I AM" refers to a child's self-esteem. "I CAN" refers to his competency - intellectually, physically, creatively. "I WILL" refers to a child's motivation, his "zest for life", his desire to do one's best.

When communicating with kids, it is important to TAKE NOTICE or be sensitive to the needs and interests of the TOTAL child. I know that I don't have to emphasize the point here that each child is unique, and indeed each child will be different each day as a result of the previous day's experiences. What I want to note here, at least based on our experience, is that a child's "I AM" or self-esteem must be developed fairly well before one can expect development or maturation in a child's "I CAN" and "I WILL". To put it another way, before a youngster can learn to share and care for others, be motivated to participate fully in the environment around him, he must feel fairly secure and confident with

himself. Hence, TAKE NOTICE. When communicating with or teaching a small child, TAKE NOTICE of just how comfortable or confident that youngster is in the particular situation.

8. Help Youngsters Be Creative

My last idea deals with the development of CREATIVITY in children. I was listening the other day to a television program where Alvin Toffler, author of Future Shock and The Third Wave, was speaking. He was describing the rapidity of change going on in our society and indicating that we are indeed entering a new era, an era that we in fact have great difficulty describing. The walls of Industrialism are crumbling around us, he says, but what is evolving in its place is still undetermined. Given this, I believe that it is going to be increasingly important, if people are going to be able to deal with the complexities and the uncertainties of the future, to be CREATIVE. What I mean by being creative is the ability to be able to reshuffle the familiar into new patterns.

What does this mean for us as parents and teachers? If we are going to encourage our youngsters to be creative, it is important to show children that there are no "pat" answers, that there are no preset solutions to the problems of growing up. We have to encourage kids to think, to develop their own attitudes, their imaginations, to come up with their own ideas. Even the toys we choose for kids can help or hinder creativity. Many bought today, I believe, are far too preset or structured or too realistic for imaginative play.

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Perhaps if I leave you with one important point, it would be this. To be creative, you have to have a wide and diverse experience in your background. The greater the number of ideas you can draw upon, the more apt, I think, you will be in coming up with a solution or an idea when faced with a new situation. Our communications environment is becoming more varied, more complex, but potentially, I believe, more fruitful in terms of developing creativity. It is up to us as parents and teachers to understand the media in our environment and to ensure that our youngsters receive a wide and varied experience.

And so I end, as I started, with a poem, a poem which I hope summarizes a number of the ideas raised this morning.

My hands were busy through the day,
I didn't have much time to play
The little games you asked me to
I didn't have much time for you.
I'd wash your clothes, I'd sew and cook,
But when you'd bring your picture book
And ask me please to share your fun
I'd tuck you in all safe at night
And hear your prayers, turn out the light,
Then tiptoe softly to the door . . .
I wish I'd stayed a minute more.
For life is short, the years rush past . . .
A little boy grows up too fast
His precious secrets to confide
There are no longer games to play
No goodnight kiss, no prayers to hear . . .
That all belongs to yesteryear
My hands, once busy, now are still.
The days are long and hard to fill.
I wish I could go back and do
The little things you asked me to.

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN -- the most precious gift you have is your TIME!